



For Immediate Release
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Contact: Dan Virkstis
202-224-4515

Statement of Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.)
Open Executive Session to consider renewing the import restrictions in the
Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act

Thomas Jefferson said: "The freedom and happiness of man . . . [are] the sole objects of all legitimate government."

Today, we meet to consider a resolution to advance the freedom of the Burmese people. We consider S.J. Res. 41, which renews import sanctions on the Burmese government. Burma's is a government that time and again has repudiated the freedom and happiness of its people.

Instead, the Burmese government has prohibited freedom of speech and press. It has engaged in gross human rights violations. It has made children into soldiers.

I have long held that unilateral sanctions are not often effective. For that reason, in 2003, when Congress first considered imposing sanctions on the Burmese government, Senator Grassley and I worked together to ensure that the import ban on Burmese products was not open-ended. We agreed to revisit the ban on an annual basis to ensure that the sanctions remain the appropriate tool to address America's human rights concerns with Burma.

Sadly for the Burmese people, the human rights situation in Burma continues to deteriorate.

This year was a particularly chilling year in Burma. The Burmese government forcibly retaliated against Buddhist monks who were peacefully demonstrating against the poor economic conditions in Burma. And the government demonstrated its sheer disregard for the Burmese people by refusing the speedy entry of international aid after the cyclone in May.

America has responded vigorously to these atrocities. Just last week, the House and Senate approved tightening trade, economic, and other sanctions against Burma.

Our European allies have also imposed import restrictions on Burmese gems, timber, and metal. And they have imposed financial and travel sanctions on Burmese government officials.

The UN has called on the Burmese government to conduct a free and fair constitutional referendum, allow greater humanitarian aid, and open a dialogue with the political opposition.

The worsening situation in Burma — coupled with strengthened action on the part of the international community — underscores the appropriateness of renewing the import ban today.

Let us renew these sanctions today, and fulfill a worthy objective. Let us use the tools at our disposal to help achieve the freedom and happiness of the Burmese people. I invite my Colleagues to come together to approve the resolution before us today.

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